



Family planning: the key to sustainable development

Summary

January 2016 sees the launch of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), a set of 17 objectives that will guide international development until 2030, and the International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP) in Indonesia.

Events such as the ICFP are intimately linked to the success of the SDGs because movements to increase global access to family planning are essential to slowing the global population growth that makes development goals difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Despite its importance, aid funding for family planning is only a small percentage of total aid spending and has been falling since the mid-90s. This briefing highlights how almost all of the SDGs are negatively impacted by rapid population growth and how the entire SDG framework could be made achievable by universal access to family planning services.

Global population growth

Total world population is expected to increase by one billion by 2030 and four billion by 2100.ⁱ The majority of this increase will be in developing countries, many of which will see their populations double by 2050.ⁱⁱ

The UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health (APPGPDRH) reviewed extensive evidence submitted by development academics, professionals and organizations on the impact of this growth on development. They concluded that, much like the failed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) before them, the SDGs would be difficult, if

not impossible to achieve at current levels of population growth.ⁱⁱⁱ

The good news is that there are many positive steps that can be taken to slow population growth such as preventing child marriage, enhancing women's empowerment and encouraging smaller families. One of the most important methods of slowing population growth is providing access to contraception and other methods of family planning. Countries across different continents, with very different cultures, religions, resources and histories have all managed to rapidly reduce fertility rates in recent years through this method.^{iv}

State of family planning provision

Currently there are over 200 million women around the world who lack access to safe methods of family planning.^v It is estimated that it would cost approximately \$6.7 billion per year to provide universal access to family planning.^{vi} This is a fraction of total aid spending and, according to UNICEF, "family planning could bring more benefits to more people at less cost than any other known technology."^{vii}

The following are areas of sustainable development which are severely impacted by rapid population growth and which could benefit greatly from increased access to family planning services:

Economic growth and employment (SDG 8)

Marie Stopes international (MSI) has found that even a five per cent increase in access to contraception can boost a small sub-Saharan African country's GDP per capita by 35 per cent.^{viii} There are many reasons for this. For example, access to family planning means that women have greater control over when,



or whether, they have children and thus they have greater ability to participate in the workforce and the economy.

Lower population growth as a result of greater access to contraception also helps redirect government and household spending away from providing basic services to a continuously expanding population and towards more productive investments that can boost economic productivity. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA): “Where rapid population growth far outpaces economic development, countries will have a difficult time investing in the human capital needed to secure the well-being of its people and to stimulate further economic growth.”^{ix} This is why for every \$1 invested in increasing access to family planning services, it is estimated that governments can expect a return of up to \$120 in total overall economic benefits.^x

High population growth can also significantly limit opportunities for employment. Between now and 2050, the labour force in the developing world will increase by 33 thousand persons per day in countries where already about 80 per cent of the work force is unemployed, underemployed or are only vulnerably employed.^{xi} It would require unprecedented economic growth to provide jobs for all these people and this seems highly unlikely in a world where the number of people unemployed globally has *increased* by 54 million since 1990.^{xii} A much more feasible solution would be to slow population growth through increased investment in family planning services.

Poverty and Hunger (SDG 1,2)

Economic growth has historically been the main driver of poverty reduction globally and therefore when high population growth inhibits economic growth it can have a

negative impact on poverty reduction and hunger. Many countries that have managed to significantly reduce fertility rates have experienced significant economic growth and poverty reduction.^{xiii}

Fewer job opportunities as a result of rapid population growth also negatively impacts poverty and hunger. This is not only because people without jobs will find it harder to provide for themselves and their families but also because the increased supply of labour reduces wages for jobs that are available.

These factors help explain why the Overseas Development Institute predict that the numbers of people living in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa will *increase* by 50 million over the next 15 years and why the UK Department for International Development (DFID) has recognised that population growth represents at least a big a threat to poverty reduction as HIV/AIDS.^{xiv,xv}

Gender Equality (SDG 5)

Lacking access to contraception means that hundreds of millions of women worldwide lack the autonomy to decide when, or whether, they have children. This means that much more of their lives will be spent rearing unintended children and risking death or disability through pregnancy or childbirth related complications. This limits their ability to work outside of the home, to pursue education and to participate in public life.^{xvi} The UN has found that women’s empowerment rises as fertility rates fall and MSI has found that even a small increase in access to contraception in a country can have positive effects on gender equity.^{xvii,xviii}

Water, sanitation, energy (SDG 6,7)

Rapid and relentless population growth forces governments to direct limited resources to continuously expanding basic services. Most developing countries already struggle to provide clean water, sanitation and energy to their people and this task is made almost impossible by the addition of one billion more people by 2030. Thus reducing demand for these services is a much more feasible approach than continuously expanding supply.

Not only does slowing population growth make it easier to provide these services, it also frees up government resources that can be used for more productive investments that could boost economic growth, thereby increasing the wealth of the economy and its capacity to provide critical services.

Education (SDG 4)

The UN claims that progress made in increasing school enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa is under threat due to the rapid growth of the primary school age population, as governments are struggling to provide sufficient schools and teachers - a problem experienced even in wealthy nations.^{xix,xx}

The UN has also identified household resources as a key determinant in school attendance in poor countries.^{xxi} Thus low fertility rates and smaller families make it more likely that parents will have the resources to be able to send children to school. Studies have also shown that, when poor parents are forced to decide which children go to school, it is often daughters that are kept at home, which negatively affects gender equality.^{xxii}

Health (SDG 3)

Healthcare is severely impacted by rapid population growth. Lack of access to safe family planning methods and high fertility rates mean that hundreds of women die every day from pregnancy or childbirth related complications and this number is likely to increase alongside population growth.^{xxiii}

High fertility rates can also affect HIV/AIDS prevalence as the disease is often spread from mother to child during pregnancy. DFID argue that family planning thus offers an effective way of reducing the number of cases of disease transmission.^{xxiv}

High fertility rates can also affect infant and child mortality, as children in larger families are less likely to both receive appropriate nutrition and to be immunized.^{xxv,xxvi} Women with larger families are also less likely to be educated and this is associated with higher infant and child mortality.^{xxvii}

The spread of communicable diseases is also affected by population dynamics. One of the key factors in the unprecedented scale of the 2014 Ebola outbreak was the fact that disease made it to urban areas with high population densities.^{xxviii}

Increased access to family planning services can positively impact the above areas but it will also help reduce the need to expand health services, thereby saving governments money that can be invested into better healthcare and better quality of life for the already existing population. Even in developed countries family planning has huge benefits for the healthcare system. It is estimated that every £1 spent in the UK on family planning saves the National Health Service £12.50.^{xxix} Moreover, in a world where many live without adequate healthcare it seems implausible that the SDG target of universal health coverage by 2030 is possible



when global populations is expected to increase by one billion people over that same period.

Slum growth (SDG 11)

By 2050, seven out of 10 people are expected to live in urban areas and a significant percentage of these people will be living in slums.^{xxx} A rapidly growing population means that governments that seek to tackle slum growth must either somehow continuously provide more housing or they can invest in a cost effective solution like family planning, which can lower the demand for housing and which comes with all the other outlined benefits for people and the economy.

Sustainable consumption and protection of the environment (SDG 12, 14, 15)

As population levels have increased since 1990, global carbon emissions have increased by 50%, marine fish stocks have fallen by 20%, 5.2 million hectares of forest have been lost every year since 2000 and a substantial proportion of animal and plant species have declined in both population numbers and distribution.^{xxxii} It will be very difficult to adequately change these patterns of consumption, production and waste in a world with one billion more people demanding food, fuel and other natural resource. Therefore reducing demand through family planning services is vital.

Conflict and migration (SDG 16)

Factors resulting from unsustainable population growth such as diminishing job opportunities, poverty, large youth populations and increased competition for resources have all been identified as playing key roles in conflict, extremism and political instability.^{xxxii,xxxiii} These factors can be observed in many current conflicts, for example the Boko Haram insurgency in

Nigeria. Some studies have even found that the risk of conflict is proportional to a country's population.^{xxxiv} This is very concerning when a region such as sub-Saharan Africa is already ravaged by conflict and its population is expected to double by 2050. This will have devastating human costs for the continent but it will also be extremely negative for economies. The World Bank claims that it takes, on average, 14 years for countries that have experienced conflict to return to pre-conflict economic growth trajectories, meaning that population growth's affect on conflict will have dire consequences for poverty reduction.^{xxxv}

Population growth will also have negative consequences for global migration patterns. The same factors that cause conflict also cause people to move in search of better lives and therefore, the addition of one billion more people over the next 15 years will likely have a significant impact on the refugee and migrant crisis that Europe is currently facing. This mass migration will in itself have significant implications for population and sustainability across the continent.

Since 2001, the significant majority of global aid spending has been directed towards enhancing security in developing countries and this spending is dwarfed by global defense budgets.^{xxxvi} For a fraction of global security spending, governments could tackle the problems of conflict and migration at source, while also providing a desperately needed service that will have positive consequences for almost every other SDG.

Climate Change (SDG 13)

The greater the numbers of people on the planet, the greater our collective carbon emissions. Therefore, confronting climate change will be increasingly difficult in a world



where population levels are increasing by 80 million people annually.

Developing countries, where most population growth is located, produce significantly less carbon dioxide than developed countries. This fact leads some to argue that population growth is not a major factor in climate change. The problem is that developing countries deserve the right to grow economically and to increase their consumption and this has historically been associated with huge rises in carbon emissions. A recent example of this is China’s huge increase in meat consumption and associated greenhouse gas emissions alongside its impressive economic growth. Thus slowing population growth through increased access to family planning services is central to long-term reduction of carbon emissions.

Research commissioned by Population Matters in partnership with Lancaster University has found that family planning is also the most cost effective method of abating carbon emissions – costing only \$1.1 per tonne.^{xxxvii} These figures do not include the fact that family planning also abates the carbon that would have been emitted by a non-existent person’s non-existent descendants in perpetuity as well as the other many additional benefits that come with family planning services.

Conclusion

Global population levels have been increasing rapidly for decades. This trend significantly limited the success of the MDGs and threatens to do the same for the SDGs.^{xxxviii} Therefore increasing access to family planning services is vital to sustainable development.

There are few, if any, development interventions or technologies that can have as

transformative an impact on countries, economies and lives as family planning services. Universal access to family planning services could be provided for a fraction of total global aid spending and can, among other things, help to reduce mortality, improve women’s empowerment, boost economic growth and slow unsustainable population growth.

Yet funding for family planning services is inadequate and has been falling for decades. We are calling for policymakers to learn from the mistakes of the MDGs and to increase funding for family planning and sexual and reproductive health services to 10 per cent of total official development assistance (ODA). Meeting the unmet need for family planning is not only a pragmatic approach to achieving the SDGs, it is absolutely critical to their success.

ⁱ<http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Graphs/>

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ<http://www.appg-popdevrh.org.uk/Population%20Dynamics%20and%20the%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals.pdf>

^{iv}http://populationmatters.org/documents/neighbouring_countries.pdf

^v <http://www.unfpa.org/family-planning>

^{vi}<http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2010/addingupfpcosts.aspx>

^{vii}<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2013/smsn/ngo/360.pdf>

^{viii}<https://mariestopes.org/sites/default/files/Time%20to%20Invest%20Summary.pdf>

^{ix}<http://www.unfpa.org/resources/population-and-poverty>

^x<http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/publication/post-2015-consensus-population-and-demography-assessment-kohler-behrman>

^{xi}<http://www.un.org/en/events/povertyday/background.shtml>

^{xii}http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%2028July%201%29.pdf

^{xiii} http://populationmatters.org/documents/neighbouring_countries.pdf

^{xiv} <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9839.pdf>

^{xv} Potts, M. (2007). Population Growth and the MDGs, *J R Soc Med*, 100(6): 256–257

^{xvi} McNay, K. (2005). The implications of the demographic transition for women, girls and gender equality: a review of developing country evidence. *Progress in Development Studies*, 5(2): 115–134

^{xvii} Ibid

^{xviii} <https://mariestopes.org/sites/default/files/Time%20to%20Invest%20Summary.pdf>

^{xix} http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20%28July%201%29.pdf

^{xx} The Guardian Article
<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jul/22/baby-boom-pressure-on-uk-secondary-schools>

^{xxi} http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20%28July%201%29.pdf

^{xxii} Plan Canada Report
<http://plancanada.ca/Downloads/BIAAG/GirlReport/2012/BIAAG2012EnglishFullReport.pdf>

^{xxiii} http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20%28July%201%29.pdf

^{xxiv} Potts, M. (2007). Population Growth and the MDGs, *J R Soc Med*, 100(6): 256–257

^{xxv} Li, J. and Taylor, B. (1993). Childhood immunisation and family size, *Health Trends*, 25(1): 16-9

^{xxvi} <http://www.fao.org/docrep/w0073e/w0073e03.htm>

^{xxvii} <http://unchronicle.un.org/article/education-key-reducing-child-mortality-link-between-maternal-health-and-education/>

^{xxviii} http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20%28July%201%29.pdf

^{xxix} <http://www.fpa.org.uk/news/continued-cuts-sexual-health-services-resulting-significant-costs>

^{xxx} http://www.who.int/kobe_centre/publications/hidden_cities_media/p1_who_un_habitat_hidden_cities.pdf

^{xxxi} United Nations Report
http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20%28July%201%29.pdf

^{xxxii} www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA50828

^{xxxiii} <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmfaaff/86/8602.htm>

^{xxxiv} Collier, P. and Hoeffler, A. (2004). Greed and Grievance in Civil War, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56: 563 – 595

^{xxxv} http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDRS/Resources/WDR2011_Full_Text.pdf

^{xxxvi} http://eview.anu.edu.au/anuu/vol6_14/pdf/ch06.pdf

^{xxxvii} <http://populationmatters.org/2015/population-matters-news/report-on-family-planning-and-carbon-emissions/>

^{xxxviii} http://populationmatters.org/documents/mdgs_briefing.pdf